

2012-10-01 Introduction To The Eightfold Path

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SPEAKERS

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The standard ways of talking about the heart of Buddhism or the central element of Buddhism is the Eightfold Path. And one of the nice things about one of the aspects of this eightfold path is this is a part of Buddhism that's practical. That involves engaging ourselves being engaged personally being involved personally, it's very easy to read books about Buddhism. And there are some very abstract books about Buddhist philosophy, that you can not agree with and not agree with or be confused by, but it kind of keeps you in your head and then the mind and idea world of ideas. And, and you know, in terms of Buddha Buddhism, the point of Buddhism is not to stay in our head not to stay in ideas, but to be able to drop down into our the immediacy of our life, and how we live our life and how we engage with our life. And, and in order to make our life turn our life into our practice arena. As I like to say it's tell some people, for lay people like us who don't live in monasteries, the Eightfold Path is the way to make our life our monastery. And the idea that this is this is how to inhabit our life in such a way and through our life, so that the elements of our life can be supportive and a part of the Buddhist practice. So the so part of what it's called a path because it's partly because it's something we walk, we engage in, and you know, when you walk on a path, you bring all of yourself along, you don't leave your arms behind or your head behind, or, you know, you kind of bring all along and so it's a fully something you fully include. A path also has the implication the idea that there's a destination many someplace you're going. And in fact, in time with the Buddha in his teachings, there's a very clear idea of where this path goes. And the path goes to, you know, liberation to enlightenment. These are big terms, great ideals. And that sometimes can seem kind of mystical or strange or imply some kind of The Big Bang Theory of spirituality, just get that enlightenment, you'll be happier after some, or some idea of some wonderful Disneyland of great spiritual experiences. The goal of the Buddha and using the word liberation is the liberation from suffering, which is the immediate experience that all of us can have of both mild suffering and some of the great sufferings that can experience in life and to somehow to have a path that addresses that. And supposedly, it's meant to address it directly, so that we can become free of that suffering. So we don't think walk around with the kind of stress that our system has to carry If we are suffering, suffering is quite stressful to have. And it's one of the remarkable things that the Buddha offers a path to happiness, a path to freedom from suffering, that in a religious path in the sense that it religious perhaps in the sense that it involves the ultimate meaning the ultimate value of our life. And the Buddha does this without any recourse to the supernatural, that no recourse to Gods no recourse to something, some tenants or beliefs that you can't verify for yourself. But actually, he presents it in something that you can verify in your own experience, quite easily, I think. And so closely connected to the Eightfold Path, and is contained within it is the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Truths is teaching that When you have suffering, there's a cost to that suffering and that causes found in something in you, which is your craving, your thirst, your clinging, and you don't suffer. But the Buddhist analysis is you don't suffer unless you yourself, participate in that suffering by contributing, clinging or craving. In

that it's your contribution, you can stop contributing. And so you'd stop contributing by what's called the cessation of clinging. And that's a session of clinging involves the cessation of suffering.

And then the fourth noble truth is that because it's not easy just to endure clinging, there is the Eightfold Path. So those four those steps is something I think you all have experience with. It's not something mystical and strange that That you know, you don't you don't already know, I'm pretty confident that all of you and your way if you kind of think about it, apply this to your situation have been in situations where you found that you were overly engaged in a situation with too much desire or too much tightening or subset. And you felt, you know, I think this and feeling this hurts, this is painful, stressful, and realizing, you know, I better stop this behavior of wanting to so much. And so you let go. If you can let go. Or if you can't let go easily, then you kind of figure out what you can do that helps you let go. And it could be as something as simple as what happens to you in the checkout counter in the supermarket. You know, you're there's a long line, you've chose the wrong line to stand in. And you might even go to a different line. But it turns out that now this is the wrong line. The first one is going faster. And so you feel you feel you're impatient. You start getting tight and tense. And you start kind of questioning the efficacy or efficiency of the checkout clerk. And you know, and you kind of feel yourself tightening up and tensing, and your mind's racing. And after a while, you notice that this is stressful to be under, and you look around and you realize you can't really do anything here. You're there, you have to kind of go through the line. And you realize that nothing really doesn't help anything to can be tense about getting through. And so you realize I should, I should cool it. I should not be so eager or so desperate to get through the line. And so perhaps you take you relax, or perhaps you can't relax, and you realize I need help. I need a path to help me relax here in the checkout counter. I think maybe I'll try breathing deeply. And so you breathe deeply perhaps. And that breathing deeply, somehow gets you to relax your body and, and some of that stress of wanting to get out quickly has dissipated. So I don't know if that was, you know, the best choice of an example. But what I'm hoping is that with that kind of example, you can also spend some time thinking about all the different places in your life that you already know the Four Noble Truths. They're not strange topics. They're not something that's, you know, mystical or supernatural or something foreign. You actually already doing it. And in that you're already doing it, maybe have a different formulation of how that works. But basically, you already do it. What the Buddha was saying, you could do this, probably a lot better than you already are. You can apply this in a stronger and deeper way or more full away, and to address some of the deepest forms of suffering that you have in your life. And so what people have found over time with the Buddha is that the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path applies at many different levels of a person's life. It applies its checkout counter It applies in at work it applies in our interpersonal life It applies at home and applies in you know many different situations. And, but it also applies in what I think could be called the spiritual or existential dimensions of our life. And for, for people who there are some people who see that the Eightfold Path the Four Noble Truths represent their the ultimate meaning and purpose of their life. It's integrated in the fullness of all aspects of their life, it provides an integrated, complete path of life and so much so that we call it the air in the West, the religious religion and their religious perspective, a spiritual path. And the people who then take it for full potential of this ordinary thing of the Four Noble Truths are set to become people who are enlightened, become realized become liberated. And it's quite remarkable to Have an experience of the mind the heart, liberated from any kind of stress whatsoever or any kind of clinging and desire.

For some people than the Eightfold Path, the Four Noble Truths together are tremendously joyful, that there is his brings a lot of joy. The Buddha talked about the joy of the Eightfold Path, because it gives a life, sense of purpose. It gives it a meaning. It gives it definition so, you know, you know what your life is about. You know, there's a lot of things to do in life. So many things that sometimes people are confused of what to do and, but for the people who have certainty about the Eightfold Path and the

Four Noble Truths, their life is in a certain kind of healthy way, defined or, or, and so even though you might still have to make decisions about what kind of work to have and where to live in a job to have or whatever. The core the ballast of a life the sense of purpose and meaning has to do with getting through the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path in a meaningful way. The Buddha talked about these the full path, as being the most reliable refuge you can have. Many Buddhists will say the Buddha Dharma and the Sangha is the refuge, which is very meaningful for people. But it's a refuge in the sense that it's support for us to apply the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, in all the different areas of our life. I can be challenging to do this. Some people find it it's the most challenging thing of their life, to really take the Four Noble too seriously, and let it really drop down into the depths of their life to the deepest existential places where we're of clinging and holding the very, very sense we have a being a self the core idea. As we carry about who we are, are not innocent in the sense that they're just there casually and likely and, you know, we'll take it or leave it. But there's often a tremendous amount of clinging and holding to identity, to a sense of self. There's often a tremendous amount of clinging to what we want or what we don't want. Some people feel that life is insecure. They feel not safe. They feel that it doesn't have any stability in this world. And so they know where to find an orientation find a stability, they cling and hold on to things. Some people cling and hold on to relationships, some people to status, some people do jobs, some people to home, some people to bank accounts, some people to religion, is a very popular thing to cling to, including Buddhism, and sweets is kind of a paradox, right? You're clinging to the teaching the teacher teaches you not to cling so no, no. So eventually it works. And, and some people cling to, certainly to identities, they claim to being someone. Some people occasionally cling to their suffering because of their suffering is familiar and gives them some sense of purpose and orientation and place in the world. And so sufferings very important to hold on to. And the Buddha talked about the Eightfold Path as a refuge as a place of support, not as a place to escape the world like a refuge place to go with rather as a an understanding and an orientation that provides safety wherever we go. It's the portable refuge is the portable safety. And the primary thing it's a protects us from is ourselves. And rather than you know the world around us, because the greatest danger Heart is how we what we do inside of ourselves is a great teaching of the Buddha gave practical wisdom. And it goes something like this. If you get angry at your enemy, you're doing your enemy a favor. I think it was a little bit more than that. You're doing your enemy a favor in harming yourself in the ways your enemy couldn't. So your enemy might want to harm you, but that your enemy can't get into your heart, your metaphorical heart unless you react in such a way. If you get angry or you get close down or do something you're responsible for your heart does, not your enemy. And so there's so certain domain of our inner life that all people can only get into and cause harm. If we Somehow receive it and do something with what happens to that what people do.

So the one of the core aspects of this eightfold path and the Four Noble Truths is taking responsibility for ourselves. And some people don't want to be involved in Buddhist practice because of the way in which it requires if you're interested in this path, eight requires taking responsibility for yourself and doing this. And, you know, some people will feel even protest the spiritual tradition, we have to take responsibility. I mean, the whole point of a religion for some people is to have someone else take responsibility. And you know, and then it seems maybe selfish or maybe it's, you know, it's a lot of work. But, you know, if you're going to learn a foreign language, you're not expecting someone else to learn for you. If you're going to learn to swim, you don't have to swim. You have to take responsibility for learning yourself. You don't just kind of You know, read a book and then, you know, carry the book around saying, I have the truth and now I'm going to swim. The, you know you we have taken a lot of places in life where we have to take responsibility. And so for deepest inner places in our hearts or in our life, the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, are ways of taking responsibility for ourselves. And so the Buddha called that a refuge to support the place of safety. And I wouldn't under it, don't underestimate how powerful and meaningful It is to be protected from yourself, to be protected from

yourself so that you don't cling so that you don't tighten up you don't end up living in fear that greed and hate don't become a problem. It's impressive to me I'm in teaching now in here in this valley for over 20 years. And I get the I have more people coming and talking to me now about addiction problems than I had the 1990s I don't know if that, you know, maybe people are talking to me move down by the way they didn't. But all kinds and one of the one of the ones that's really escalated a lot I mean it, I'm sure it was there in the 90s. But no one talks about it. But now they talk to me because there are people are really troubled, is pornography. I think maybe because of the internet. And there was someone who told me just last week about how, you know, Night after night, staying up until two o'clock at night, and then getting two hours of sleep or something and then going to work and the challenges of this and what was going on. So, you know, this is, you know, that's not to protect being protected from yourself, you know, people are doing these things to themselves. So is there a path to freedom, the Eightfold Path, the Buddha called a middle way, the middle way, and it was meant to be the middle way between sensual indulgence, staying up until the middle of the night. Watching internet and self mortification, ascetic practice and harming yourself intentionally. Because back in ancient India, those are seen as two extremes the people who pursued sensual pleasure to an extreme, and the people who pursued aesthetic practices, self mortification, practice and the middle way supposed to be the middle way between those. And I think it's a beautiful middle way, because you're not supposed to deprive yourself, but you're not supposed to indulge yourself. You're not supposed to live a life of hardship when you follow the Buddhist path. But it also you're not supposed to have a life that's taking more than you need. Part of the middle way and part of the Eightfold Path is a life of contentment. And it's exemplified in the life of the Buddhist monastic. I think in the light compared to the lifestyle of many of us here. And Buddhist monastic lifestyle is one of great renunciation but in especially, I think in you Ancient India, but still today, the Buddhist monastic life was post design for a person to have just enough to be comfortable with not not now yoga more. So just enough clothes so that they were close properly, just enough food so they can be fed fine, just enough shelter so that they're protected from the elements, just enough medicine so that they can be cured if there's an illness. What else do you need, you know, just enough so they're comfortable. So they're not supposed to be ascetic and you know, emaciated, but enough to be comfortable.

So how this translates to us here as the middle way is that the middle way perhaps, is doesn't require us Is there no essential requirement to become renunciant to deny ourselves in some heavy negative way, but it also is not meant to be some way to indulge ourselves and how We negotiate to this world of not indulging, but not harming is a very interesting approach to life. But not not because indulging and harming ourselves or wrong, but because both of those things cause suffering. And if we want to become free of suffering, then we have to really take a look at how we live our lives. And can we find a way of living our lives supports the process of relaxing, releasing, opening up that eightfold path entails. The so the Eightfold Path is meant to include our whole life. And so I don't know if you feel it all fits in there. But I have my theories about the Buddha live today, or what would be the night bath and the night that and maybe the 10th even but you know, maybe it was a simpler life back the different life so it was enough so begins with what's called it right view. Right View is that works really well for translation for the Indian Buddhist word, deity has the same kind of double meaning in English a view of belief for understanding an idea, and a way of seeing. So begins with a way of seeing, and I like to think of it as an orientation. It's the orientation we have for how to find our way through through life. So orientation we have so we find the path and a full path is a path. And this metaphor of path is very meaningful for me, because when I look at the Buddhist path, I see a wide and straight and clean path in front of me. When I look at the world and how we're gonna live in the world, it's crooked, you know, it's all kinds of things. But the Eightfold Path doesn't exist except in the mind's eye, or the wisdom eye or the Dharma that we have. And if we use the wisdom, I the inner light to see I see so I see a path to go straight ahead, very clear, very clean, very open, for us to walk incomparable to anything else. So it begins by finding that path, the right view, right orientation. And then with that view of the path, the possibility

becoming free of suffering of then it continues with right in what's called the right intention to have the right to orient, right sense of purpose or aspiration and a right motivation, the right way of thinking about what we're going to do. And the simplest way of talking about this that something meaningful in a direct way for many people is that it helps the right intention is not to indulge in sensual pleasure. And the operative word is indulge. Don't stay open to two o'clock at night. On the internet cultivates loving kindness, goodwill, cultivate goodwill, and cultivate compassion, or have that as a orientation, the intention for your life. And it's a beautiful thing. And this do those two, especially those three, especially the last two have goodwill and compassion includes the world around us and people around us, because goodwill and compassion is interpersonal. So the right view, the first one is the view, the view the orientation that I'm going to free myself from suffering. There's the Four Noble Truths. There's an orientation to find where suffering is the cause the end of it. That's the orientation that's the door to the path, the entrance to the path. In a sense, that's personally the next step has a lot to do with the interpersonal world we live in. It's very important how we live in our society in our communities. Unless we somehow take care of our communities and our relationship to communities. You're not going to find the path so beginning to have some interest in and having approaching the world with goodwill and compassion is really important part of this.

And then if you're interested in that, then I think what follows next comes kind of naturally is that you want to be careful what you say. Because a lot of harm gets created in society, by our speech. And so if you want to practice from goodwill and compassion, then you want to be careful that you don't speak in unkind ways, in harmful ways to other people. And so the third step of the Eightfold Path is called Right Speech, caring for your speech. And so again, here it's interpersonal, rabbit written because usually speeches mostly to people, other people, and it's such a core part of this Buddhist spirituality, that you take care about how you live in relationship to the world around you. You don't just sit in Buddhist Buddhism is not just about retreating from the world and sitting there and meditating and your eyes closed, but it has A lot to do with how you want to live your life. If what you want to do is to use this path for its full potential, the fullest possible liberation that you can experience. So care about how you speak. The fourth step in a full path is right action. Probably if you're interested in not causing harm with your speech, pretty soon you start getting interested in not causing harm in your actions either. And so how do you behave in such a way that you don't cause harm to others? How do you behave in such a way that your behavior expresses goodwill and compassion. And so the basic ideas here is you don't kill, you don't steal, you don't lie, and you don't engage in sexual misconduct, those four and then the last one as often included, is you don't engage in intoxication. You don't intoxicate yourself. Those four and those are those five causes tremendous havoc and suffering in this world of ours. It's no show shortage of people who, later on will say what was I thinking? I wish I hadn't. Then from that kind of, in a sense, if you want to be interested in how you behave and your actions in the world and how you relate to other people, then the kind of the next, maybe the next natural step is your livelihood. Many people spend much of their life and livelihood livelihood is something for many people affects many people beyond themselves. And so how to have a livelihood that doesn't cause harm, how to cause a lively, how to have a livelihood that's connected to these right intention thing, livelihood that's connected to Goodwill, and to compassion. So with that, with those first five steps with a full path, those then become the foundation for the last three. And at that point, you know, you learn to take care of your life, you're starting to create better relationships. The world around you, you're interested in goodwill and compassion, maybe it's not easy to have it, but at least you're interested in it. And that's a big change for many people don't people to really, really take it seriously and be interested in it and cultivated and develop it. And you're beginning to apply it in your life and doing the best you can do this really well, it takes it takes a lot of effort. It's not easy, necessarily. But all this then leads you to become more interested in what goes on inside of you, in your mind or your heart. And so how do I it's one thing to speak kindly, and have, you know, a job that doesn't cause harm in the world. But at some point, you realize, you know, it's really the source of all this begins, in my mind. The intentions of my mind, the

idea of what I want to do the impulses of my mind. And so at some point in this trajectory, the interest is to let me look at my mind, what am I doing there? So when you're standing in the Safeway line, being impatient, you feel a tension on your shoulders, you can certainly relax your shoulders. But you might also want to start looking at your, at your mind, if your mind is speeding, spinning around agitated, that feels painful. And so, or your mind is, you know, filled with hate for the person in front of you who, you know, can't find, you know, is paying with coins and can't find them all. And you know, and the bill is \$75 you know, and you're filled with, you know, a, you know, you're irritated, but you know, oxy. And, you know, you really have to walk, you know, it's one thing to wish that person well, but, you know, this really hurts. And so I think I need to begin taking some responsibility for my mind. And this is the sixth step of the Eightfold Path, which is right effort, and right effort means to make the effort to do the things with your mind that's healthy and avoid that which is unhealthy. Do the things in your mind that are helpful and avoid those things which are unhelpful.

So greed and hate are, are not helpful. And so can you figure out how can you track that and notice the clinging, the greed that you have hatred you have there, the variety of things, I can track it and let go of it. generosity, goodwill, compassion are helpful things. Patience is helpful things. virtue is a helpful thing. So there's a whole bunch of things that goes on inside that you want to start tracking. And it's a wonderful thing to start feeling you have some, not only can you monitor it, so you don't do things that later you regret. But not only you're monitored, monitored, but you have some ability to choose what your mind does. If you if you don't people who don't monitor their inner life, their mind their thoughts, their feelings, their impulses, find themselves that they have no choice their life and they do things. They don't know why. It's a little slightly aside, I guess, but remembering that I went to San Quentin, and I go San Quentin most years to bring a group of people to people who have been trained to be Buddhist chaplains, to see chaplaincy in San Quentin. And we went to violence prevention program. And they put us in a room full of people who murders and did an awful thing, some of these people and it's my experience of being this room of people in this violent prevention program is I feel safest with them and almost any group of people ever been with because of because of the inner work that they've done, that how they've been transformed. These are transformed men. By time they, we get to see them. I mean, there are the people in San Quentin, who are not transformed. And you know, you don't want to be alone with them, but these people are quite something.

And but one of the exercises they're given when they begin this program is they're asked How long have you been here in San Quentin? or How long have you been a little bit? echoey? Can you turn it down? it'll, it'll set a little bit better. Okay. So how, how long? You know, have you served in jail, I guess the state jail system, they move around. And, and they'll say, we've been here for 15 years, 25 years, 10 years, you know, and they write it on a chalkboard, and they add them all up for these 20 guys over there. And they have you know, it's like 425 years, you know, they've been in jail. So that's one column. And then the next column, they say, How long was here? How long was the period of danger? The period in which they were in danger of doing the crime that brought them to San Quentin. So how long was the period of danger? And they would say, Oh, 30 seconds, two minutes. You know, actually, the period of danger was actually quite short. And then then the other column they had, you know, how long that period of danger was. And, you know, added up to, you know, 20 guys, you know, I don't know what it added up to, but maybe an hour, an hour versus 425 years. So, impulse, you know, not being able to monitor yourself not seeing the choices that people make, that you make, and the consequences that you know, that lasts for so long. So the right effort has to do with learning to take some responsibility and look looking well at what goes on in our minds. To be interested in our minds, our hearts if you prefer, that kind of language requires mindfulness so then it comes natural, I think, to want to begin cultivating a greater sense of mindfulness, to pay more careful attention, intimate attention, to get to know oneself really well, to get to know yourself in a way probably you've never known yourself before. To know the subtle movements of the mind, the subtle desires, the subtle

feelings of subtle intentions, the subtle, subtle, beautiful, that's not so subtle, the beautiful qualities of who we are, that are maybe overlooked and not tapped into so much. Mindfulness is a powerful tool, both to help us see clearly some of the places of attachment that are quite subtle and tenacious, but also to see some of the most beautiful parts of the human heart that are of great resources and great things that we can turn our life into gifts to people. So then comes mindfulness. With the growth of mindfulness. One of the things that people discover is it's kind of hard to stay focused. You have to keep the focus to look carefully and stay on track. And so then the interest becomes how do I get more focused? How do I stabilize the mind? And that's the last of the Eightfold Path, which is right concentration. So right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration, they kind of have a kind of a trajectory, they kind of like build on each other and kind of follow each other and certain kind of natural order. With with development of the stability of mind, then it's possible to see the Four Noble Truths and how they act out in their lives much more carefully. And so we're back at the beginning. So it's kind of a spiral that goes around and around until such a time that a person experiences that path in front of them without any obstacles. Until such a time that a person has an experienced Their mind or their heart, completely cleansed. Completely cleansed of obstacles or hindrances or default what Buddhism sometimes called defilements. That clinging that's there and, and remarkable things begin to happen to people, when they experience their life without any clinging whatsoever. It's not nihilism, it's not like the end of your life. But to know that that's a possibility. And to know that so many things that we're holding on to for dear life are not needed, because the healthiest happiest way of being in the world is without clinging to feel that health to feel that happiness and sense of well being at peace.

And to know absolutely, that having that peace required letting go of clinging. That's what it took. It didn't, didn't take, you know, having or reorganizing the world, just to your liking. And having something in the world just work just perfectly so that you can be happy there. We're all can do what it wants to do, or what it needs to do what happens in the world, but finding the Eightfold Path, and that freedom is the portable way, in any situation, you find yourself, to see the freedom to see the path, to see the way forward. So that you can be free so that you can be peaceful, so that your heart can be available to the world and unobstructed way. A footpath is a really beautiful, beautiful thing. And for some people, I as I said, this becomes the primary meaning purpose orientation of our life, is what gives meaning to life to do this, and, and some people might say, well, that can't be that's kind of selfish, isn't it? You know, because it seems like I'm freeing myself of suffering. One of the best things that we can do for others is to help them become free of suffering, to become happy to have that kind of happiness. But if you don't know what that It's like, are you going to teach it to someone else? How are you going to share it to someone else, someone has to, you know, know how to do it. So that's what the Eightfold Path are for. So that's the general introduction. And the plan I have is 10. For the next eight weeks that I'm here, to go through each one of those eight factors in a slower, careful way. And see if we can make each of those factors come alive for you and be meaningful for you. And you can maybe see it, see each factors how it applies in your life and the value you might want to have for the path factor. How you want to incorporate it and find it useful for you. And, and, and then if you want to, you know if you want to come to these Dharma practice days we have on Friday, well, that's another place we will kind of explore these more deeply. Okay, so thank you.